

Child and Family Services Review Final Assessment

North Carolina

May, 2001

**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Region IV**

DETAILED SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

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I. SAFETY

Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
Total Cases Reviewed = 50 Total Cases to which Outcome Applies = 49					
	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	17	13	10	40	81.6
Partially Achieved:	4	3	2	9	18.3
Not Achieved or Addressed:					
Not Applicable:	1			1	
Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:					
	National Standard	State's Percentage	Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard	
Repeat maltreatment	5%	7.98		X	
Maltreatment of children in foster care	.4%	.83		X	

Item 1. Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment

☒ Strength ☐ Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The Division has identified as an important issue the extent to which child safety may be enhanced by implementing a differential response system in their child protective services work. According to information in the Statewide Assessment, the current policies and protocols have resulted in a CPS system culture that too often alienates families and can miss important information about family functioning while focusing exclusively on the alleged maltreatment. The Division hopes to secure the necessary support to implement a Multiple Response System demonstration in the near future. The Division is interested in learning if a different approach in the more "poverty-driven" situations will better enlist the cooperation of the family in receiving community-based services to assure child safety.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- In almost all cases, reviewers found that reports of abuse or neglect were investigated in a timely manner and face-to-face interviews with the alleged victims were conducted within 72 hours of the report's receipt. Four cases exceeded the time-frame goals and one of these involved several children, all of whom the caseworker could not interview until the following week.
- Interviews with stakeholders confirmed that timely intervention and investigation of abuse and neglect reports is a notable strength of the State's child protective services. While each county has its own toll free number for citizens to report abuse or neglect, one stakeholder felt the use and marketing of a statewide 800 number would enable the State to raise public awareness of child abuse.
- One county's use of an "on-call" worker expedited intervention during off-hour periods.
- Stakeholders agree that social workers generally do the best they can to protect children considering what they believe to be high caseloads.
- Stakeholders report that the agency has improved in educating the public on child abuse and/or neglect (CAN) reporting.
- Stakeholders were especially impressed with the rapid response to allegations involving foster homes.

Area Needing Improvement

- From the review of protective service cases (also referred to as in-home cases), and confirmed by stakeholder interviews, it has been the practice to treat subsequent reports of abuse or neglect on open cases as merely additional information for the case record, rather than as a new report of abuse/neglect, subject to the investigative time-frames and risk assessment protocols attendant to new reports. If this is a widespread practice, there could be safety concerns related to investigative time frames not being required and result in under-reporting of repeat maltreatment.
- There is some concern among stakeholders regarding the practice that dictates what reports the agency must investigate. There is an impression that the agency may be screening out cases inappropriately, possibly due to the high workloads. Some mandated reporters feel they must present suspected abuse cases in certain terms and as "grim enough" to get them investigated. The agency has taught reporters how to report, but it is a concern that they may feel they must, in some cases and to a certain extent, "embellish" reports to get them investigated.

- Although, the agency is seen as doing an effective job in responding to allegations in custody cases, there is concern regarding the response to non-custody cases. Stakeholders reported that although the department screens in cases that are considered at risk, the department may be missing others that should be served, due to the volume of caseworkers caseloads.
- Occasional concerns were noted about meeting timeframes for making determinations on investigations.

Item 2. Repeat maltreatment

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

According to the Data Profile, North Carolina's incidence of recurrent maltreatment (7.98%) exceeds the national standard of 5%. In the Statewide Assessment, the Division includes information regarding data from their "Children's Services Key Indicator Report" that reflects a recurrence rate of 4% over a six month period of time using longitudinal data to track recurrence of maltreatment up to three years. Consequently, the Division believes that North Carolina does conform to the national standard for this indicator.

The Division does not currently track the extent to which recurrence follows the same general circumstances or same perpetrator. The Division is addressing repeat maltreatment by producing the monthly Children's Services Key Indicator Report that shows how each of North Carolina's 100 counties compare to the state as a whole and to other counties of similar size in the areas of repeat maltreatment. The biennial review process discusses this issue in its report to the county's leaders and requires a formal Program Improvement Plan if needed.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- Case reviews found fewer instances of repeat maltreatment during the period under review when compared with instances of repeat maltreatment prior to the period under review. There was also an improvement in terms of the frequency of repeat maltreatment involving the same allegations and same perpetrators when comparing the period under review and the case history prior to the review period.

Areas Needing Improvement

- Four cases involved repeat maltreatment within six months of the first episode of maltreatment, during and subsequent to the period under review. One of these involved an unsuccessful trial home placement. This 8% repeat maltreatment rate that is in line with the State Profile result of 7.98%, both of which exceed the national standard of 5%.
- Because of the aforementioned practice of not treating subsequent reports of abuse/neglect on open cases as new reports, the actual occurrences of repeat maltreatment may be more frequent than that reported.

Status of Safety Outcome S1 - Not in Substantial Conformity

Of the cases reviewed, 81.6% substantially achieved Safety Outcome S1. Notwithstanding the State's assertion that a longitudinal study shows a repeat maltreatment rate of 4%, in contrast to the State Profile figure of 7.98% derived from NCANDS, the two sources reflect different cohorts of children insofar as the longitudinal study represents a State fiscal year, and the State Profile represents a calendar year. The onsite review supported the State Profile findings.

Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
Total Cases Reviewed = 50		Total Cases to which Outcome Applies = 49			
	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	12	11	11	34	69.4
Partially Achieved:	6	1	1	8	16.3
Not Achieved or Addressed:	3	4		7	14.2
Not Applicable:	1			1	

Item 3. Services to family to protect child(ren) in home and prevent removal

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The recent increase in funding for child welfare positions in county DSS agencies has improved their internal staff capacity to provide home-based services to families in which children have suffered from maltreatment. The availability of complementary, prevention-oriented services (e.g. mentoring, parent education) varies markedly across the state, however. In partnership with the state Division of Mental Health and the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Division is currently implementing a major initiative to assure that children do not have to enter DSS custody to receive the behavioral health services that they need. For the past several years, moreover, the Division has also been working diligently to build partnerships between publicly funded Family Preservation/Family Support programs and Family Resource Centers and public child welfare agencies. A number of creative and effective programs have resulted from this effort. Intensive Family Preservation Services (IFPS) has been demonstrated to be an effective, secondary-prevention program in the state. The Division is working hard to expand the program statewide. At present, the program is in operation in 59 of the state's 100 counties. This continues to be a high legislative priority for the Division.

Basis: Onsite Review

Areas Needing Improvement

- While a number of cases were timely assessed for risk and provided needed services, three cases were not assessed for risk or overlooked risk associated with substance abuse or domestic violence.
- Four cases did not receive services even though the need for them was established. In two other cases, services were delayed for over two months, in one instance until the case was transferred to a case planning unit.
- One case received Intensive Family Preservation Services (IFPS) for two months, but they were abruptly halted with no step-down services. Subsequently, language barriers and the birth of a baby contributed to the need for the children's removal.
- Some stakeholders attributed the delays or absence of services to high caseloads of 35 to 50 cases. Others cited a shortage of services or service providers. The need for bi-lingual caseworkers and service providers was cited throughout the on-site review.
- Stakeholders feel the outreach services provided in certain cases that are not screened in for protective services are too short in duration to meet the needs of many families. Stakeholders feel that families need more intervention services in non-CPS cases.
- Family Preservation Services are particularly seen as not extensive enough to meet the needs of families.

Item 4. Risk of harm to child

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Intensive Family Preservation Services (IFPS) has been demonstrated to be an effective, secondary-prevention program in the state. The Division is working hard to expand the program statewide. At present, the program is in operation in 59 of the state's 100 counties. This continues to be a high legislative priority to DSS.

During the investigative phase of Child Protective Services, the local DSS must take steps to ensure the child's immediate and long-term safety. This is assured during the risk assessment process. County DSS agencies are required to complete a family risk assessment for cases when abuse or neglect is substantiated. The decisions to maintain the child in the home, to remove the child from the home, or to return the child to the home must always be guided by safety considerations. The Division monitors the completion and documentation of the Family Risk Assessment through the biennial review process.

All foster parents must receive extensive training and must sign an agreement to refrain from using corporal punishment. In addition, when a foster parent is substantiated for abuse or neglect, the foster parent's license is automatically revoked.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- Case reviews found that the agency does an effective job of protecting children in foster care. None of the cases reviewed involved an allegation or substantiation of maltreatment in the foster home, which is in keeping with the State Profile figure of less than one percent.
- Stakeholders feel that once a child is past intake, investigations are done well and social workers do a good job of assessing child abuse and neglect cases.
- Intervention services demonstrated in the cases reviewed were necessitated by the risk of harm, and efforts were made to reduce risk.

- There was good use of relatives to address risk and support families in several cases reviewed.

Areas Needing Improvement

- There were several disparate case situations which indicated a need for practice standards for in-home cases similar to the standards developed for foster care cases, such as time-frames for risk-assessment or intervention, visitation standards, etc. In three cases, there was no intervention initiated to reduce risk of harm. In one case, the children were not seen by the department for nine months because the department assessed the risk of harm as being low, yet no decision was made on a case disposition. In another case, two reports of neglect were not accepted for investigation because the case was open for services. In a case where services were provided, they were not enough to mitigate the risks to the children, namely, the lack of heat, water, and food in the home, eventually prompting the removal of the children from the home.
- Although, reviewers found that the agency does an effective job of protecting children in foster care, they were very concerned that when additional information was called in on an in-home case providing new allegations, the departmental response did not consistently assess the risk variables. Nor did the service provision demonstrate additional services to address children's safety.
- Although stakeholders feel that once a child is past intake, investigations are reportedly done well and that social workers do a good job of assessing child abuse and neglect cases, the on-site review revealed a lack of in-depth assessment in some cases.

Status of Safety Outcome S2 - Not in Substantial Conformity

69.4% of the records reviewed substantially achieved Safety Outcome S2.

II. PERMANENCY

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
Total Cases Reviewed = 50 Total Cases to which Outcome Applies = 30					
	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	9	7	6	22	73.3
Partially Achieved:	4	1	1	6	20.0
Not Achieved or Addressed:	2			2	6.6
Not Applicable:	7	8	5	20	
Conformity of Statewide data indicators with national standards:					
	National Standard	State's Percentage	Meets Standard	Does Not Meet Standard	
Foster care re-entries	6%	1.19	X		
Length of time to achieve reunification	78%	57.66		X	
Length of time to achieve adoption	36%	25.96		X	
Stability of foster care placements	89%	61.29		X	
Length of stay in foster care*	N/A				

*Not used to determine substantial conformity.

Item 5. Foster care re-entries

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

North Carolina's data shows a very low rate of foster care re-entries, about 1% within 12 months. The State believes there are two primary reasons for the low re-entry rate. First, the level of Post-Adoption and Reunification services are available to all families that

have a child that was in DSS custody. Also, there is a process that allows DSS to maintain legal custody while the parents have physical custody. By having legal custody, the DSS is able to carefully monitor and assess the family's progress by providing a variety of supportive services. The issues affecting re-entries are similar to initial entries and the state is addressing these issues emphasizing community support for families to prevent both initial and subsequent re-entry into foster care.

The Statewide Assessment asserted that internal longitudinal studies showed that 84% of children entering custody during a 12 month period of time experience two or fewer placement settings, close to the national standard of 89% of children experiencing two or fewer placement settings. One apparent reason for the discrepancy between the internal study and the State Profile, which showed only 61.29% of children experiencing two or fewer placement settings, is the difference in the definition of "foster care". The State defines foster care in terms of the State having custody of the child. The federal definition of foster care speaks in terms of location and duration, i.e., removed from the home for at least 24 hours. Thus, the longitudinal study is based on a different cohort of children than what the State Profile or the national standards are based on.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- The on-site review confirmed the Statewide Assessment and the State Profile in regard to foster care re-entries: The State has an exceptionally low rate of return to foster care. None of the foster care cases reviewed involved a repeat entry during the period under review. Liberal use of trial home placements while the State maintains custody may be an important contributing factor to the low rate of recidivism.

Areas Needing Improvement

- There was some concern among stakeholders about the lack of post-adoption services which could increase re-entries into foster care. Many feel that adoptive families receive pre-adoption support but almost none post-finalization leading to the cause for concern regarding potential disruption. One case reviewed involved a post-adoption disruption leading to a foster care reentry.

Item 6. Stability of foster care placement

___ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

A longitudinal analysis of the 2,538 children who entered initially DSS custody in SFY 1997-98 and who either left custody within 12 months or remained in custody after 12 months, 2,134 or 84% experienced 2 or fewer placement settings. This percentage included two placements, one placement, and zero placements. A review of the data for subsequent years also shows a rate ranging from 83% to 85%. The State's internal data shows that the State is very close to the national standard, which is 89%, even though the profile data does not reflect this. The State's internal data includes all of the children in custody, including relative placements. Each county's performance in achieving placement stability is included on the semi-annual Experiences report and is assessed in the biennial review process.

Basis: Onsite Review

Areas Needing Improvement

- The on-site review found a stability rate higher than that depicted in the Statewide Profile but lower than either the State longitudinal study or the national standard. The four disrupted placements during the period under review (16%) all involved adolescents with a history of behavioral issues. Even more telling was the finding that very few adolescent foster care cases were not disrupted in some fashion.
- In a substantial number of case reviews the reviewers found that children with behavior problems experienced frequent moves due to the inability of caretakers to address the behaviors. The frequency of moves appeared to escalate the behavioral difficulties. Use of short-term (90-day) intensive residential services seemed to exacerbate rather than ameliorate the problems. Reviewers felt stability could have improved in some cases if better matches had been done initially and if increased support to foster parents had been provided.
- Some stakeholders expressed concerns about the difficulty of placing in stable homes developmentally disabled and mentally retarded children as well as teens. They felt more effort is needed to explore other relatives and other options for resources for these populations. Staffing and caseload issues were cited as barriers for this work.

Item 7. Permanency goal for child

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The median length of stay for each of the last five entry cohorts (i.e. SFY 94-95 through SFY 98-99) is (in days) 425, 401, 391 and 369 respectively. DSS attributes this improvement to increased staffing positions in county DSS agencies, the effectiveness of various initiatives that focus attention on reducing length of stay, improved relationships with GALs, improved capacity to track outcomes at the county and regional and statewide levels, and critical statutory and policy changes. Examples of the statutory changes include the requirement for a Permanency Planning hearing within 12 months after the date of initial order to remove custody and required timeframes for the filing of a petition to terminate parental rights.

Another of the initiatives that is helping to reduce the length of stay is the Court Improvement Project (CIP), which is designed to help improve the quality of court decisions regarding children and families. Through the Administrative Office of the Courts, five of the state's thirty-nine district courts currently are using CIP funding to develop and implement strategies to improve their juvenile court system's handling of child abuse and neglect cases. These districts show a substantial decrease in the Median Number of Days after the implementation of the Court Improvement Project.

Issues that present barriers to further improvement in this area of system performance include: significant level of social work staff turnover, insufficient court time, and insufficient availability of legal counsel for county DSS agencies and for parents.

The number of children in foster care has declined from a peak of 6,982 in 1997 to 5,765 in 2000. In part because of the requirements of ASFA, the percentage of terminations resulting from adoption increased from 14.8% of all closures to 21.3% of all closures. During the same period, the percentage of terminations resulting from reunification decreased from 46.77% of all closures to 41.1% of all closures. The State believes these figures represent, in part, a resolution of the backlog of long term foster care cases.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- While some of the older children in care had long-term foster care as a goal, virtually no other case reviewed had that arrangement as the interim or long-range goal. One exception was a case where the child was over age 12 and the judge reportedly would not terminate parental rights for children older than age 12. With relatives ruled out as likely guardians and reunification not possible, long-term foster care was the only alternative.
- Reviewers found in several cases timely decisions to stop reunification and move to adoption. In those cases the agency did a good job of filing for TPR within the time frames.

- While the length of time to achieve reunification and achieve adoption did not meet the national standards, the trend is demonstrably going in that direction, as measured by declining average length of stay in foster care and the declining number of children in foster care.

Areas Needing Improvement

- Case reviews found that some cases with case plans of “custody with court approved caretaker” or “guardianship” did not reflect efforts on the part of casework staff to locate guardians or any other person to assume responsibility or custody of the children.

Item 8. Independent living services

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Onsite Review

The Chafee Foster Care Independence Act, known in North Carolina as LINKS, provided the means to expand services to older youth ages 13-21.

A youth age 16 or older in foster care shall have a written standardized assessment to determine his needs in making the transition from foster care to independent living. The assessment includes education, vocation and job skills, basic living skills, and personal, social and emotional development. (Children's Services Delivery Standard #95)

Strengths

- The additional funding for Independent Living Services made possible by the Chafee legislation has enabled the State to expand these vital services for adolescent foster children. Agency stakeholders indicated their plans to expand these services eventually all counties in the State.

Areas Needing Improvement

- Stakeholder interviews revealed that only about half of the teenage foster children that could benefit from the services of Independent Living are actually offered or receive the services. The case review uncovered three cases where the children could

have benefited from ILS services, yet none were offered or provided. One caseworker was not aware of the Independent Living Program.

Item 9. Adoption

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

North Carolina reported making a concentrated effort to increase the number of adoptions in the past few years. Other factors that have contributed to this trend include:

- Adoption laws were revised in 1996, decreasing the length of time for finalization of adoption.
- Increase in the amount of adoption assistance payments.
- Supplementary adoption assistance for HIV children.
- The state Families for Kids initiative.
- Intensified collaboration with private agencies.
- Media Campaign.
- Statewide Adoption Awareness Month.
- Tracking system to follow all children who are legally free for adoption.
- Placing awaiting children on the Internet and photo-listing books.
- Mandated training for adoption staff in county DSS agencies.
- The Special Children Adoption Fund established in 1997.
- A system-wide emphasis on permanency for children within a year.
- Adoption Incentive Fund.

North Carolina reports that several challenges in finding adoptive families for children who need permanent homes include:

- Increasing adoption assistance and Medicaid through a child's graduation from high school.
- Providing free tuition for college bound children.
- Providing for a difficulty of care adoption assistance rate for all children.
- Increasing adoption opportunities for all older and handicapped children through more extensive recruitment.

- Providing extensive post-adoption services to all adoptive families.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strength

- With the exception of four cases, two of which involved delayed TPR filings, one involved a judge who wouldn't terminate parental rights for children over age 12, and one in which the judge disagreed with the State's recommendation for TPR, all adoption cases or would-be adoption cases were managed very well, with appropriate services provided and extended follow-up. Of the reviewed cases, there were no instances of a disrupted adoption.
- Stakeholders stated that young children recently entering care were moving towards adoption quickly.
- The agency is seen as reaching adoption goals a lot faster since ASFA in cases with no hopes of reunification. Stakeholders feel there is better communication with the courts now, and children are moving into permanency faster. There are less continuances, and judges and generally social workers (until adoption) staying with the same cases allows them to know the families better.
- There are attorneys on the agency staff who facilitate permanency for children.

Areas Needing Improvement

- Case reviews found adoption being ruled out as a plan for children over age eight, as there appears to be a general opinion that children after this age are very difficult to move into adoption. Stakeholders expressed this as a concern, including judges and county attorneys.
- There was some concern among stakeholders about the lack of post-adoption services.

Item 10. Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

North Carolina has used IV-E Waiver status to pilot subsidized guardianship for children.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- Case reviews found overall that the goal of “custody with court approved caretaker” was selected only after other permanency plans had been considered.

Areas Needing Improvement

- The State has experimented with subsidized guardianship through a title IV-E waiver, in which the State would pay a board rate for guardians, mainly relatives, at a level higher than they would otherwise qualify for under Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), yet lower than the board rate for licensed foster homes or adoption assistance. The initial results of this effort to create more permanent living arrangements were somewhat disappointing. During the past year, they increased the board rate in the hope that it would spur greater recruitment of would-be guardians. However, local stakeholders maintained that it was not the board rate which dampened enthusiasm for recruiting guardians, but rather the concern that when the demonstration was over, the counties would be obligated to continue these higher payments at their expense.
- As noted earlier with regard to the disruptions of adolescent foster children because of behavioral issues, the apparent need for therapeutic foster homes and institutions exceeds the supply. It was the consensus of the reviewers that additional resources needed to be developed to deal with these issues.

Status of Permanency Outcome P1 - Not in Substantial Conformity

73.3% of the cases reviewed substantially achieved Permanency Outcome P1. The statewide data indicators from the State Profile exceeded the national standards for foster care re-entries, but did not meet the national standards for length of time to achieve reunification, length of time to achieve adoption, or stability of foster care placements.

Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
Total Cases Reviewed = 50 Total Cases to which Outcome Applies = 30					
	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	12	6	7	25	83.3
Partially Achieved:	3	2		5	16.6
Not Achieved or Addressed:					
Not Applicable:	7	8	5	20	

Item 11. Proximity of foster care placement

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- In the foster care cases, reviewers found that 97% (all but one child) were placed in the same community or county.

Areas Needing Improvement

- Stakeholders and staff expressed concern about needing more foster homes in order to continue to place children in their county of residence. Stakeholders also expressed concerns about the lack of “training schools” in the immediate area. It is reported that this lack of resource requires youth placed in this type of delinquency facility to be placed out of the county.

Item 12. Placement with siblings

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- It was apparent from the case review that the State makes special efforts to keep siblings together in foster care placements. There is a provision in the State licensing law which authorizes the Division of Social Services to waive certain requirements regarding space and capacity in order to keep siblings together.* Partly as a result of this provision and the priority it represents, all but one family that involved more than one child were placed in the same home.

Area Needing Improvement

- While keeping siblings together in foster care is a current strength, stakeholders pointed out that with the sharp growth in large Hispanic families and with the relatively few Hispanic speaking foster homes, the continuing efforts to keep families together will be more difficult.

* Section 471 (a)(10) of the Social Security Act generally prohibits waivers of standards for non-relative foster family homes or child care institutions receiving funds under title IV-E or title IV-B of the Act.

Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Since services standards were developed in North Carolina there has been a requirement for contacts that defines the frequency expectations whether or not the children are in the custody of the agency. Face-to-face contact with both parents and children along with home visits are part of the contact requirements for child welfare workers. The standard for children in out-of-home placement is once per month with the parent, child and caregiver. These standards are monitored in the biennial review process and have also been the focus of intense supervision and monitoring in several counties.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- In the majority of cases reviewed, substantial efforts were made to ensure that parents and children had regular and frequent contacts.
- In some cases visitation was outstanding in that when siblings were separated visits occurred frequently between children and families. Planned visitation through case planning increased frequency when appropriate. Case reviews indicated that visitation with parents and siblings was usually supported when not harmful to the child.

Area Needing Improvement

- In two cases, visitation was not addressed, arranged or promoted. In one case, there was evidence the department withheld visitation as a punishment for acting-out behavior.
- Although frequency of visitation with family members was a strength in most cases, in some cases without termination of parental rights and with the case plan goal of “court approved caretaker” few efforts to maintain relationships with parents were found.

Item 14. Preserving connections

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- Case reviews revealed the great majority of foster care placements are supporting children and youth in maintaining connections. Reviewers found good efforts to maintain contacts with relatives. Youth were allowed, and on occasion encouraged, to maintain contact with former foster parents. Staff successfully arranged innovative services for some children to continue to attend the same school.

Areas Needing Improvement

- In four cases there were no efforts to maintain connections. Two of the cases involved Hispanic children who were placed in non-Hispanic homes and the language barrier vis-à-vis the foster parents, legal parents, and the department presented a problem in communicating on this issue.
- Several stakeholders expressed concern about the lack of Spanish speaking homes or homes that know an Asian dialect.
- Reviewers felt the agency could encourage more the development of life books for more children in adoptive placements.

Item 15. Relative placement

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The State's entry cohort analysis reflects an increase in the number of initial placement with relatives over the past four years from 14% to 19% of the entire cohort, as well as an increase in the use of Family Foster Homes from 40% to 44%.

County Departments of Social Services are required by state law, policy and practice standards to give first consideration to relatives (broadly defined) when placement is necessary and to place children in the most family-like setting possible. Compliance by individual county DSS agencies with the practice standards related to this issue are assessed in the biennial review process.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- In all cases reviewed but one, relatives were considered for placement when they were available. Several in-home cases involved non-custodial placement with a relative.

Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- Case reviews found that positive relationships between children in foster care and parents were maintained and encouraged.
- Agency efforts to encourage positive relationships include the use of mental health services to promote and improve relationships when needed.

Status of Permanency Outcome P2 - Not in Substantial Conformity

83.3% of the records reviewed substantially achieved Permanency Outcome P2. The State showed strengths in five out of six indicators for Permanency Outcome P2. With multiple indicators affecting each case rating, there were not strong patterns of particular indicators identified as areas needing improvement consistently, but there were enough cases where the more than one of the indicators failed to function so as to place the State out of substantial conformity. The issue seems to be one of assuring that all the indicators come together in a consistent manner in all cases.

III. CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
Total Cases Reviewed = 50 Total Cases to which Outcome Applies = 50					
	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	13	11	10	34	68.0
Partially Achieved:	4		2	6	12.0
Not Achieved or Addressed:	5	5		10	20.0
Not Applicable:					

Item 17. Needs and services of child, parents, foster parents

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The Child Medical Evaluation Program is available to social workers through a network of local medical and psychological providers to assess children referred to the medical evaluators during an investigative assessment for neglect, and/or physical, sexual or emotional abuse. (Children's Services Delivery Standard #18)

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- In 36 cases, service needs of the child(ren), parents, and foster parents were identified and appropriate services initiated or provided. Service provision was particularly appropriate and timely for younger children in foster care. In cases where needs were not identified or services provided, they were most likely to be in-home service cases or foster care cases involving adolescents.
- Foster parents were very positive about services and supports that they receive. Working foster parents receive child care and respite.

Areas Needing Improvement

- In 14 cases reviewed, service needs were either not identified for all family members, or if identified, not provided.
- In-home service cases and families with adolescents presented the most significant challenges in either identifying service needs or providing the needed services. In some cases, the problem was the non-cooperation of family members. In others, the cases needed additional attention in the case planning and service delivery process.
- The focus of in-home cases appeared to be on the identified child and treatment of that child's identified issues as opposed to focusing on the family as a whole. A symptom focus was apparent without assessing the root of problems in some cases.

- The department appeared to be more child centered instead of family centered. In five cases, the services provided did not meet the needs. In three other cases, the needs of some family members (usually the child) were identified, but not for others.

Item 18. Child and family involvement in case planning

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- Parents, foster parents and children of sufficient age are invited to participate in case planning. The agency provides transportation if needed. In all but 15 cases, there was active participation by all affected members of the family in planning.
- In one site a professional mediator is available if disagreements occur on case plans in court.
- In the cases reviewed, some parents were actively involved in case planning; and when parents spoke up, plans were adjusted accordingly. Reviewers found some child involvement and consultation with the child in case planning.
- Stakeholders reported more people participating in case planning, looking at what's happening in cases and trying to understand the case from beginning to end. Most stakeholders expressed high levels of respect and praise for social workers' and supervisors' knowledge of their cases and stated that for the most part they go beyond the norm in their work.

Areas Needing Improvement

- Of the 15 cases (out of 50) where lack of joint planning was an issue, six involved teenage children who were not involved in the process, five involved one or both parents who were not involved, and three had no completed plan at all.
- Some stakeholders feel the high caseloads sometimes prevent the agency from including children and families in case planning.

- The case review determined that families and children were not often actively involved in identifying the issues which must be addressed to resolve the case. Case planning was sometimes not collaborative. Sometimes parents had to assert themselves to get input included.

Item 19. Worker visits with child

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The State reports a belief that frequent contacts support protection as well as more timely permanence for children. Frequent contacts with children enables social workers to develop with the children a relationship of trust and a free flow of communication. The biennial review process includes evaluation of the standards regarding regular contact. Data from this present biennium reveals the following: in case planning/case management there was 92% contact within one week of substantiation and 74% in regards to the standard of 2 contacts a month with children; in the placement cases there was 89% contact within 1 week of initial and subsequent placements and 91% contact within 1 month with child.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- Case reviews showed visits with children were, for the most part, in accordance with, or at times exceeded state policy.
- Frequency of visitation was enhanced by the services provided by contracted agencies.

Areas Needing Improvement

- Out of fifty cases reviewed, twelve cases involved visitation frequency that did not meet the State's standards. They were frequently in-home cases, frequently in-home cases and deemed by the agency to involve low risk. Workers cited high caseloads as the primary reason for missed visits

Item 20. Worker visits with parents

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The State believes it was a legitimate concern when in the past families have reported they did not see their social workers. Traditionally, one of the concerns raised about meeting the frequency of contacts requirement was large caseloads. The State believes that the caseload standards and the counties' willingness and ability to comply have resulted in a significant reduction in regards to this barrier. Another barrier to maintaining frequent contacts has been the social worker's lack of understanding of the importance of contact and the large percentage of relatively inexperienced social workers. Social worker turnover has impacted service delivery and the ability to maintain contacts because of uncovered caseloads. The State reports that every agency in North Carolina has a procedure for covering these caseloads and children are not left unprotected, but the state reports that clearly the contact standard suffers if a position is left vacant for several months. The State reports that although there will never be a complete solution regarding staff vacancies and turnover, positive differences are occurring due to improved training and counties' commitment for seeing that children and families are connected to a social worker.

Data collected during this present biennium reveals the following: in case planning/case management 2 contacts a month with parent/caregiver occurred 80% of the time; and in terms of the placement cases contact within 1/month with parent or removal family (if reunification remains the plan) occurred 90% of the time.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- Like visits with children, most of the cases reviewed involved visits with parents that were within State standards. Foster care cases were more likely to experience regular visitation than in-home cases.

Areas Needing Improvement

- Although in some areas worker visits with parents was outstanding and exceeded requirements, in other areas, especially in the in-home cases reviewed, this was an area needing improvement. Nine cases were identified as not meeting the State standards. Most frequently the caseload size was cited as an obstacle to meeting with parents.

Status of Well-Being Outcome WB1 - Not in Substantial Conformity

68% of the records reviewed were substantially achieved for Child and Family Well-Being Outcome WB1.

Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
Total Cases Reviewed = 50 Total Cases to which Outcome Applies = 46					
	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	17	10	10	37	80.4
Partially Achieved:	1	1	1	3	6.5
Not Achieved or Addressed:	3	3		6	13.0
Not Applicable:	1	2	1	4	

Item 21. Educational needs of the child

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

A child for whom an educational need is identified must be referred for an educational assessment within a week from the time of identification. (Children's Services Delivery Standard #61). Case review scores of 100% indicate that social workers consistently advocate for appropriate assessment. In an effort to assure that children remain in the least restrictive environment, social workers advocate for children to remain in the same school placement.

The Child Education Status Component, recorded on form DSS-5125-III, documents current education information about the child and is maintained in the record with a copy provided to the placement provider. This component is monitored against the state standards by the biennial review. Results of all cases reviewed in sixteen counties September-December 2000, indicate that 91% contained the Child Education Status Component.

For children who are special needs identified and in county department custody, social workers are challenged by the barrier of not being allowed to serve as educational surrogate parents in developing and signing the child's Individual Educational Plan (IEP).

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- In the foster care cases, reviews showed involvement with the school by caretakers and advocacy for the children's needs. Foster parents are seen as competent and dedicated to helping children achieve their educational goals.
- Stakeholders reported improvement in children's educational needs being met through Individualized Education Program planning meetings, conferences for intervention, and agency supervisors' focus on involvement of social workers and foster parents.
- Case reviews found that, for the most part, special educational needs were addressed and met for children in foster care.
- Reviewers found evidence of worker involvement in Individualized Education Program planning meetings.
- Early intervention services, tutoring and educational assessments were provided in some cases.
- Stakeholders noted much improvement in collaboration at one site between the agency and the education system through liaisons on staff at the agency.
- Other supports are available to help meet children's educational needs including tutoring, summer camp programs, and special incentives for performance and efforts to keep children in the same school.

Areas Needing Improvement

- Out of 46 applicable cases, 9 reported unmet educational needs. Four involved adolescents with a history of expulsions, multiple repetition of grades, multiple school changes, or pregnancy which threatened school completion. Three cases identified mental health issues which would likely disrupt school success, yet further testing was not initiated.
- In some cases, the caretakers were more involved in meeting the children's needs than the caseworkers.

- Some stakeholders noted breakdowns in communication at times between the agency and the educational system. Examples are the schools not having certain information they would like as well as the schools not sharing certain information the agency needs. There appeared to be some issues regarding schools not knowing who can receive confidential information in certain cases and having those persons in their data system. Some stakeholders also reported that information sharing between the department and schools is less effective in the in-home cases than in foster care cases.
- Screening of whether educational needs exist is not routinely done by social workers in the in-home cases. As noted above in regard to adolescent cases, a failure to address educational needs can further exacerbate behavioral issues which may eventually lead to removal from the home.

Status of Well-Being Outcome WB2 - Not in Substantial Conformity

80.4% of the records reviewed substantially achieved Child and Family Well-Being Outcome WB2.

Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.					
Number of cases reviewed by the team according to degree of outcome achievement:					
Total Cases Reviewed = 50		Total Cases to which Outcome Applies = 50			
	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Total Number	Total Percentage
Substantially Achieved:	14	10	10	34	68.0
Partially Achieved:	6	5	2	13	26.0
Not Achieved or Addressed:	2	1		3	6.0
Not Applicable:					

Item 22. Physical health of the child

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Children are referred for a physical examination within one week of an initial placement. (Children's Services Delivery Standard #60). A child identified with a need for dental, developmental or psychological assessment must be referred within one week from the identification of the need. Case reviews from cases reviewed in sixteen counties September-December 2000 indicate 92% compliance with the referral for a physical examination and 100% compliance for referral for appropriate assessments when a need is identified.

The Child Health Status component of the Family Services Case Plan documents current critical health information about the child and is maintained in the record on form DSS-5125-II with a copy to the placement provider.

One of the barriers faced by social workers, for children who have dental needs, is the low rate of reimbursement for dental care and the sparse number of providers that accept Medicaid for dental services.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- The findings of the review indicate that resources for health care were sufficient. In one site reviewed, the response to adolescent needs included a specialized teen health care facility.
- This site also has staff nurses who effectively monitor the children's health needs and help foster parents obtain appointments with a consistent doctor. Social workers often go to medical appointments with children and are seen by stakeholders as hard working and diligent particularly in foster care cases. Foster parents are involved in and informed of children's medical care and are seen as very competent and dedicated to helping the children in their care maintain health.
- Excellent timely referral, screening and follow-up is done for children in placement, including use of specialists if needed, even though out of county in some cases.
- Reviewers in one site noted creative solutions to dental needs with development of an onsite dental clinic.

Areas Needing Improvement

- Physical health was not routinely screened or addressed in the in-home cases with no noticeable issues. In four cases reviewed, fairly serious identified needs, i.e., hepatitis B, pregnancy, leukemia, etc., were not addressed.

Item 23. Mental health of the child

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Children in DSS custody will receive behavioral screenings as part of EPSDT/Health Check. Once the screening is completed, the child will then be referred to the area program for further assessment if the screening indicates a need for mental health/substance abuse services. The area program completes the assessment and works with the relevant parties and agencies involved to develop a treatment plan that may include residential services or other outpatient activities. In addition, these specific needs are addressed in each child's family services case plan and services are then provided as appropriate. The provision of services is reviewed in accordance with the timelines specified in the child's case plan.

Recent state legislation mandates Memorandum of Understanding between the state DSS and DMH as well as between county DSS and area mental health programs in order to access treatment funding for children with mental health needs. The MOA outlines the timeliness for the assessment process and defines emergency, urgent care, and routine care. The MOA defines the role and responsibility of both the county DSS and area mental health program. The MOA also requires that the directors of the local DSS and area mental health programs establish local governance teams to keep track of the children who are waiting for services and to prioritize services to children based on the availability of funding. These teams will also be responsible for sharing financial resources to ensure that the children who need mental health services receive them. This "system of care" of mental health service delivery is scheduled to be implemented February 1, 2001.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- There is an excellent quantity of mental health services in one site reviewed, and in that site there is a memorandum of understanding that gives child welfare children priority.

Areas Needing Improvement

- In eleven cases reviewed, more so in in-home cases than foster care cases, mental health issues were either not identified, identified but with no follow-through, or the mental health needs of some family members were met and not for others.

- Stakeholders expressed a significant concern that the mental health system is overloaded. There are waiting lists for certain services, resulting from understaffing of Mental Health facilities. There is concern among some stakeholders about mental health services not being focused on helping families or the department achieve children's permanency goals. Children do not always have the same counselor at Mental Health.
- While residential placements are available that address mental health issues for children and youth, foster and adoptive parents frequently have difficulty obtaining effective treatment. Children's behaviors have to escalate to a level that requires placement to obtain mental health services in some cases.
- There are issues due to social workers not being able to access some services due to payment issues. Stakeholders expressed a concern about the managed care system that in their opinion has presented problems in getting certain services funded for certain family members. An example of this issue is substance abuse services changed from being DSS funded to Mental Health funded, and now some services are not covered.
- Some stakeholders reported they have concerns about children's mental health issues in dealing with grief and the issues presented when social workers assigned to them change.
- Appointments are not always scheduled with regularity, depending on the severity of cases.
- There are other issues that hinder service provision such as disagreements between the two agencies about which agency is responsible for certain supports for families, such as for children in Mental Health residential facilities.
- Stakeholders have concerns about lack of support of a foster family for a child who is not living in a foster home but still needs the support of a family.
- Stakeholders reported that developmentally disabled mothers do not seem to receive mental health supports to help them resolve child abuse and neglect issues. It appears that they tend to be determined not able to parent, particularly in a domestic violence case. Stakeholders felt there is not enough linkages between Mental Health, Domestic Violence and Child Protective Services.
- Mental health screenings for needs are not routinely done by social workers for in-home cases.
- Psychiatric assessments are reportedly not completed timely for children in group homes.
- Getting families to follow up on services is also an issue.

Status of Well-Being Outcome WB3 - Not is Substantial Conformity

68% of records reviewed substantially achieved Child and Family Well-Being Outcome WB3

IV. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3 X	4

Item 24. State is operating a Statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The State does not have an operational SACWIS system; however, from North Carolina's child welfare data base, the State generates numerous monthly reports at the state level and makes these reports available electronically to both State and local staff for analysis. The reports provide both aggregate data and child specific information for individual case managers to use and these reports include data regarding individual case status, child placement information, and the status of case reviews and plans.

A Services Information System (SIS) provides client and case manager identification information, authorization for services, and the dates and types of services opened for the client, as well as numerous other client-specific functions.

The Child Placement and Payment System collects information on all children who are in the legal custody or placement authority of the county. The system tracks the child's living arrangement, case status, and plan goal.

Special request reports are produced when a standardized report does not meet the specific research need. North Carolina has developed several reports that identify children in the backlog)children who have been in the custody or placement responsibility of a county department of social services for over a year) in order to aid counties in achieving timely permanence for these children.

The Division produces two specific reports from the child welfare database on a regular basis that are specifically designed to facilitate self-evaluation and system performance for both state and county staff. The Key Indicators Report is on critical child protection outcome indicators, and the Experiences Report is a report that tracks cohorts of children entering DSS custody/placement responsibility for the entire lengths of their custody. These reports have become the center point of county evaluation efforts.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strength

- The Child Placement and Payment System collects all of the information required under 45 CFR 1355.34(c)(1); namely, the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goal for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care.
- This system is linked, via an eleven digit client ID number to a Services Information System, which serves as a master file for all DSS service clients. While this information is readily available for federal reporting purposes, it is not readily available at the local level unless the caseworker or supervisor work in the county where the child/family lives. This is because the eleven digit identifier can only be accessed in the county where the client lives. This makes it difficult for a county to obtain a service history or foster care history on a client who obtained those services in another county.

Status of Statewide Information System - Substantial Conformity

CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3 X	4

Item 25. Provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child's parent(s) that includes the required provisions.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Current policies and standards include the requirement that social workers develop a case plan with parents and provide them with copies of the case plan. The case plan must be in a standardized format and must be developed with the parent whenever the agency is providing involuntary services to protect children, prevent removal or effecting reunification. Both policy and standards require that the parents participation begin no later than the removal of their child. According to the Statewide Assessment, in all cases in which services have been provided during the case planning/case management phase, the agencies have worked with the parents prior to the child's removal and have developed a case plan, so parents are familiar with the process and procedures.

In 1998, the State developed and disseminated to all 100 counties a handbook for parents. The handbook is designed to assist parents when their children are being removed and tells them what they can expect from DSS staff. The case plan form was designed with an emphasis and focus on parental strengths, has a place for parents to write their comments and requires parents' signatures. Parents participate in the determination of what services are indicated to remediate family problems that cause continued agency involvement. Standards require that this plan be reviewed with the parents at least every 90 days in order to evaluate the progress.

It was reported that judges have come to expect the social workers will include a copy of the case plan with their court presentation report, and, in many instances, the case plan becomes incorporated as part of the court order.

Review of data for the present biennium (16 counties) indicates that the Family Services Case Plan, Part A occurs 98% of the time. The Family Services Case Plan, Part B occurs 96% of the time.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- Generally, case plans were documented in the records, despite an inconsistent effort to involve interested parties in the development of the plans.

Area Needing Improvement

- Case plan reviews are scheduled during office hours, preventing some parents, foster, and adoptive parents from attending. Some case plan are developed without parental involvement and presented to the parents for their signature and concurrence.
- Case plans are rarely modified or updated and there is very limited involvement of children and youth in the case planning process.

Item 26. Provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

North Carolina policy and standards require both administrative and court reviews. Each county is monitored for this during each biennial review. North Carolina law requires a judicial review within 90 days of disposition and every 6 months thereafter, in addition to the requirements for administrative reviews. Administrative reviews are required at 60 days following placement, 90 days thereafter and every 6 months henceforth.

In the previous biennium data from the 99 counties reviewed indicates that administrative reviews occurred 90% of the time. Data for this same period for court reviews is 94% at the first 6 months, 98% at the second 6 months and 93% reviews occurred as required thereafter.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strength

- Stakeholders reported that the emphasis of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) legislation to achieve permanency as soon as possible had impacted county operations in terms of expedited court activity to terminate parental rights, where warranted, and to increase the number of adoptions as both a goal and actual outcome.
- PACT reviews are held at 60 days, 90 days, and 6 months thereafter. Knowledgeable, long-term community members serve as members of PACT, lending much continuity to the process.

Area Needing Improvement

- Counties experience court delays due to limited court dockets and continuances.

Item 27. Provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the State has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The requirement for permanency planning hearings in the court had been part of North Carolina standards and statutes since October 1, 1997. Following the passage of the ASFA, North Carolina revised its statutes to comply with the requirement of ASFA. The permanency planning hearing is often held at the 11 month point in order to undergird the importance (and support the possibility) of achieving the permanency goal by the 12th month. Currently, 91 counties participate in the Challenge for Children initiative which places an emphasis on preventing children from remaining in care for more than one year. During the present biennium, data indicate that permanency planning hearings occur 84% of the time.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- A statewide automation system is in place, alerting every county department of all out-of-home cases requiring the 12 month permanency hearing.
- Local permanency review committees, composed of a diverse group of community stakeholders, meet on a monthly basis to assess the permanency goal for all children in out-of-home care. Social Workers, parents, children and foster parents attend these meetings and present information to the committee members.
- Stakeholders believed the establishment of the "Families for Kids" Project aided in the acceleration of permanency for children.

- A pilot Mediation Project is assessing the barriers to permanency.
- From interviews with stakeholders, it was apparent the State has an exemplary Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) program, with GALs in every county and available to be involved in every pertinent case. The Division of Social Services has maintained a good working relationship with State GAL coordinators, as reflected by the joint training the two organizations undertook on the ASFA requirements.

Area Needing Improvement

- Timely permanency and TPR hearings vary among counties. Many stakeholders reported significant delays in timely court hearing due to the limited court time allocated to dependency issues and continuances granted by local judges.
- Decisions regarding case plans are sometimes prodded by the 15 of last 22-month rule as opposed to concurrent planning on the child's entry into foster care.

Item 28. Provides a process for termination of parental rights proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The Division monitors how the county department of social services are doing in terms of meeting ASFA requirements regarding this issue by this being a particular point of emphasis for the Children's Program Representative (regional consultants) in their frequent contacts with each county agency and compliance is assessed as part of the biennial review process. Some of the key issues/barriers that have affected timely termination of parental rights are: insufficient court time for child welfare staff, insufficient availability of attorneys dedicated to county DSS's, lack of informal and formal training for judges on child welfare laws and policies, and the absence of a statutorily-required timeframe for hearing TPR petitions.

The number of children who achieved the goal of adoption has grown from 979 in State Fiscal Year 97-98 to 1,231 in State Fiscal Year 99-00. The median length of stay in foster care was 426 days in SFY 1996. The length of stay decreased to 412 days in SFY

1999. The State believes this is a result of the emphasis placed on achieving permanence in a timely manner and the effective use of permanency planning hearings for these children.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- The case review confirmed that the agency does a good job of filing for TPR within the time frames.
- Stakeholders feel the 15/22 rule is a good practice standard, and the agency is taking steps to meet that standard. Social workers and supervisors keep track of the children's cases due for action, and there is a State automated system by which the counties are notified of an action due.
- There was a significant increase in the adoption rate (as much as 1800% in one county).

Area Needing Improvement

- There were delays in the terminations due to the courts' calendars, locating and serving parents, court continuances and court time from hearings to decisions. The practice of scheduling cases for frequent court reviews (2-3 months) uses available calendar time. There is no statutory requirement for time from filing for TPR to the termination.
- The State does not proceed with the recruitment of adoptive homes until the finalization of TPR proceedings. This recruitment effort should be initiated at the time of the filing of the TPR petition.

Item 29. Provides a process for foster parents, preadoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Since the establishment of the requirement for administrative reviews, foster parents, preadoptive parents and relative caregivers have been an integral part of the case review process. With the state's implementation of the ASFA requirements, statutes, as well as policy and standards, require that children's caregivers be noticed and given an opportunity to be heard in court reviews. All 100 counties are required to give written notice of administrative and court reviews that includes the caregivers opportunity to be heard. This requirement is monitored for compliance through the biennial review process.

Several counties afforded caregivers the opportunity for input when these caregivers cannot be present at administrative or court reviews. The counties disseminate a questionnaire that can be completed by the caregivers. Several jurisdictions have accepted court reports from caregivers in which the caregiver can detail the progress of the child as well as their concerns and recommendations.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- All foster parents and pre-adoptive parents receive written notice of hearings and reviews. Some foster parents attend and participate in the proceedings.

Area Needing Improvement

- Stakeholders report that there is no formalized process in place to ensure foster parents and pre-adoptive parents are encouraged and allowed to participate during the proceedings.

Status of Case Review System - Substantial Conformity

VI. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3	4 X

Item 30. The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

In 1992, the North Carolina General Assembly directed the Division of Social Services to conduct reviews of county child protective services (CPS) programs every biennium. A CPS Advisory Committee developed standards of CPS service delivery, and these standards became effective in state policy in 1993. The Division began the biennial review process for child protective services in 1993. Beginning with the 1998-2000 biennium, the biennial review process included scoring for the child placement service standards addressing foster care and adoption issues (which became effective in policy in 1996 after being developed by the Child Placement Services Advisory Committee) in addition to scoring for the child protective service standards. In preparation for the 2000-2002 biennium, the two advisory committees were combined and this committee reviewed the existing standards, clarified and revised them, and added a few new Standards to ensure compliance with ASFA and state law.

In 1997, the General Assembly passed legislation strengthening child fatality reviews by creating Child Fatality Review Teams and instructed them to conduct in-depth reviews of any child fatalities which have occurred involving children and families involved with local departments of social services child protective services in the 12 months preceding the fatality.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- North Carolina has developed and implemented standards for all foster homes. State law provides DSS authority to waive certain requirements related to space, capacity, or age of the provider, when those waivers would be needed to keep siblings together or it is in the best interests of the child.
- The application of Practice Standards for Child Protection and Child Placement is the expectation for all social workers.

Area Needing Improvement

- The foster care recertification does not require a complete assessment of adherence of foster home standards.

Item 31. The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures implemented.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The role of quality assurance is carried out through the following mechanisms: Division's Response System to Constituent Concerns; Children's Programs Representatives; Children's Services Biennial Reviews; IV-E Monitoring; Child Fatality Reviews; Program Improvement Plans; Special Assistance and Improvement Team (SA-IT); and NCGS 108A-74 - "County department failure to provide services: State intervention in or control of service delivery.

Each county's child welfare program is extensively reviewed every two years. In the new biennium, the 16 county Biennial Reviews have included review of 370 reports that the county DSS did not accept for investigative assessment, 195 investigative assessments, 364 CPS case planning and case management cases, and 387 child placement cases. Fourteen out of the sixteen counties (reviewed thus far this biennium) have passed the category of CPS intake and investigative assessment, and the two that did not pass the category are required to submit Program Improvement Plans. One county did not pass the category of CPS Case Planning and Case Management and is required to submit a PIP for that category. All sixteen counties reviewed have passed the category of Child Placement Services.

Counties that score less than 80% in any category of their biennial review are required to submit a PIP to the Division, outlining actions to be taken by the agency to correct the deficiencies noted in the biennial review in that category. In the biennium that ended June 30, 2000, 57 counties were required to develop Program Improvement Plans in at least one of the biennial review categories. Of the 57, 40 have successfully completed Program Improvement Plans.

In 1997, the General Assembly enacted legislation and funding for the development of the Special Assistance and Improvement Team (SA-IT). The mission of the SA-IT is to provide intensive, specialized assistance to county departments that will improve their capacity to ensure safe, permanent homes for children. During SFY 99-00, 11 counties have been served through program analysis and performance assistance by the SA-IT team.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- North Carolina conducts a comprehensive biannual review of all county departments. This periodic review process was developed in response to the North Carolina General Assembly's mandate in 1992 that North Carolina DSS conduct reviews of county child protective services programs to ultimately strengthen the child protective services delivery system statewide and to document the county agencies' achievement of the level of practice identified in the Standards for Child Protective Services (CPS) delivery. In 1996, standards were developed for Child Placement Services programs as well. The review entails onsite review of sampled cases in counties and a review of six categories; Intake, Investigative Assessment, Case Planning and Case Management, Prevention and Placement, Planning Following Placement, and Legal Process and Documentation. Each review area has designated criteria and county offices are required to develop Program Improvement Plans (PIPs) for any category receiving a score of 80% or less.

To date, three reviews and respective report periods have transpired, each providing valuable information and recommendations for improving subsequent reviews (new aspects added to the process and resulting reports. The State expects this process to continue gauging the level of services provided to children and families and providing information on the extent that counties are achieving desired outcomes of safety, permanency and well-being. County Supervisors and case workers are knowledgeable concerning these biennial reviews, and particularly when PIPs are required. While very similar in nature to the federal Child and Family Services Review, it does not involve stakeholders outside of DSS.

Areas Needing Improvement

- There is no consistent county administered quality assurance review. Some counties incorporate community review teams, however there is no feedback mechanism to the review team regarding any action taken on their recommendations to county staff.

Status of Quality Assurance System - Substantial Conformity

VII. TRAINING

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3	4 X

Item 32. The State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The Staff Development team, currently comprised of 16 consultant trainers, seven clerical support staff, one program manager, and one administrator has the responsibility of developing and implementing an integrated, competency-based program of training. Every year it develops a course schedule to provide the required pre-service and in-service level courses with related continuing education opportunities for service providers (defined as child welfare services staff, foster/adoption/kinship parents, volunteers, residential care providers, child welfare attorneys, community agency staff, and students). Five regional training centers have been developed and are managed by the N.C. Division of Social Services. Additionally, the State has contracted with a wide variety of universities, community colleges, and private training partner consortiums to provide in-service training.

Since 1995, state statute requires that foster care and adoption social workers receive 84 hours of pre-service training and 18 additional hours of in-service training annually thereafter. In 1997 the General Assembly passed a new law that makes 72 hours of pre-service (prior to direct client contact) and 24 hours of in-service training for all DSS child welfare services staff and supervisors mandatory.

The Statewide Assessment indicates that pre-service training does an effective job of preparing new workers in terms of foundations of child welfare, basic job knowledge, and indirect benefits (such as networking opportunities). However, the assessment also indicates that some parties believe the pre-service training is too philosophical and not functional enough. Supervisors identified that pre-service training needs to be expanded in order to more fully address risk assessment, case planning, interviewing, and use of forms. Based on informal feedback from the counties and information obtained through focus groups, modifications have been made in the pre-service training curriculum. A thorough review and re-write of the curriculum is underway to address concerns raised in terms of the effectiveness of the pre-service training.

Basis: Onsite Review

North Carolina DSS is committed to providing a comprehensive statewide training program for child welfare staff and service

providers. The State Staff Development Team, through the Children's Services Statewide Training Partnership (CSSTP), has developed and implemented an integrated system to ensure that legislative mandates are met and that ongoing professional development opportunities are available for N.C. DSS staff and service providers. All phases of the curriculum reflect the agency's goals and priorities of safety and permanency. The competency-based training is developed and presented through four regional training centers in partnership with community colleges throughout the state.

Strengths

- Stakeholders, staff and supervisors consistently acknowledged the requirement for new child welfare services staff and supervisors workers to complete 72 hours of mandated pre-service training prior to engaging families as well as the mandate for 24 additional hours of in-service training. New workers routinely attend these sessions which are offered continually to accommodate new hires. The initial 72 hours is completed within three weeks and consists of courses covering foundations of family-centered practice, an introduction to the county DSS structure and procedures for family assessment and change. The additional 24 hours of in-service training must be completed within one year of employment. In-service training consists of the following four courses (1) Legal aspects of CPS; (2) Child Development in Families at Risk; (3) Effects of Separation and Loss on Attachment; and (4) Medical aspects of Child Protective Services. Overall, the initial training provides an effective orientation.
- A Children's Services Training Advisory Committee is in place which advises the State Development Team. The committee, comprised of state, regional and county staff as well as representatives of universities, community colleges and private training partners meets six times annually to advise the team regarding the effectiveness and quality of the training programs with an eye toward strategic planning and program evaluation.

Areas Needing Improvement

- The training curriculum implemented as a result of the 1997 legislation was applicable only to child welfare services staff initially hired on and after January 1, 1998. To ensure consistency of practice and improve skills of all DSS staff, consideration should be given to assessing the skills of staff hired prior to that time and encouraging their participation in appropriate courses.
- The pre-service training does not include sufficient mentoring or 'on-the-job' training for new workers; once required training requirements are met, new workers receive full caseloads and are not always fully prepared for the complex range of responsibilities presented.

Item 33. The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

During the calendar year 1999, the Children's Services Statewide Training Partnership, provided a multiplicity of training opportunities for service providers. The Staff Development Team, Children's Services of the N.C. Division of Social Services, manages the CSSTP. During 1999, a total of 34 different curricula were provided, with 222 training events occurring which equals 1078 days of training. A total of 4 894 participants (duplicated count) attended training. In addition to these training events, a three day "Challenge for Children" conference was held in Winston-Salem and approximately 700 service providers and presenters attended the conference.

The NC Child Welfare Education Collaborative seeks to strengthen public child welfare services in the State by increasing the number and diversity of well trained and highly committed MSWs and BSWs in local Department of Social Services. The Collaborative provides financial support for selected social work graduate and undergraduate students who will commit to employment in a North Carolina County DSS.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- DSS perceives training as a critical, positive component of professional development and is committed to continuing an effective, comprehensive curriculum. In 1999, 222 training events were offered through the Children's Services Statewide Training Partnership. Over 7,000 participants attended these events. This reflects an increase in the number of events presented and number of participants over the prior year.
- DSS, through the Children's Services Statewide Training Partnership, offers an abundance of training opportunities for staff and service providers. DSS child welfare staff and supervisors have access to training schedules and conferences. Training is reported as beneficial to workers who attend. Some events include joint meetings for children's services staff, family

preservation/family support staff, and foster/adoptive parents. Partner agencies and service providers often participate in conducting sessions.

- The North Carolina Children’s Services curricula structure includes series 200 courses required to be taken by social workers and social work supervisors within the first year of employment (18 hours for CPS workers and 39 hours for foster care and adoption social workers). Courses are offered covering areas of CPS, foster care, adoption, family preservation and support, and independent living; workers participate in courses based on their respective job functions. After the first year of employment, social workers and social worker supervisor are required to participated in 24 hours of continuing education every year. Close to 20 different classes are offered under the continuing education curriculum (series 300 courses). Workers are aware of the requirements and participate in course work as their schedules permit.
- North Carolina DSS, through the CSSTP, has developed a five-year strategic plan for evaluating the effectiveness of the training curricula. The plan includes components on participant satisfaction, learning, application and outcomes. The first phase of this evaluation, participant satisfaction, was implemented in 1999; results are not yet available.
- Local operations include periodic, usually monthly, staff meetings which include training and opportunities to discuss unusual case-specific issues.

Areas Needing Improvement

- DSS workloads preclude workers from participating in optional training events; scheduling decisions are left to the workers with minimal oversight or follow up by supervisors to ensure new workers take advantage of available training.
- Local workers need more focused training in the areas of domestic violence, substance abuse, sexual abuse, children’s behavioral issues and Hispanic cultural issues. A need also exists for worker training support in the areas of crisis management and stress management.

Item 34. The State provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Since 1995, State statute has required that prospective foster parents receive 30 hours of training prior to licensure and 10 hours of in-service training annually thereafter.

In order to implement these requirements, DSS selected the Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting: Group Preparation and Selection Series (MAPP-GPS) as its primary curricula. Three other in-service training is available for current foster and adoptive parents: Fostering and Adopting the Child Who has been Sexually Abused, Deciding Together, and GPS for Foster and/or Adoptive Families for Children Exposed to Drugs or HIV. The Division is responsible for training county staff to deliver certain components of the foster and adoptive parent training program. As the delivery of this training occurs by staff at the local level, the frequency and effectiveness of the training across the State is somewhat inconsistent.

In addition, DSS contracts with Independent Living Resources (ILR) to deliver training to the foster and adoptive parents of adolescents. The department also supports the North Carolina Foster Parent Association in holding its annual foster parent conference. Held in November of each year, the conference generally attracts over 300 foster and adoptive parents.

Each year the CSSTP makes available to all staff in NCDSS licensed ChildCare Institutions, Group Homes, and Private Child Placing Agencies the same array of training as described in item #33. The CSSTP philosophically embraces the notion that staff who are trained together, regardless of whether they come from the private or public sector, will ensure that a common vision and direction will achieve positive outcomes for children and families.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- Foster parents acknowledged participation in the required MAPP training (Model Approach to Partnership in Parenting), and touted the quality of this training.
- Foster and adoptive parents are aware of in-service course offerings; most participate in the courses specifically designed for foster parents and adoptive parents, such as ***Deciding Together***, a preparatory course for families initially considering fostering or adoption.

- Foster parents reported quality training at annual State Foster Parent conferences. In certain localities, DSS works with foster/adoptive parents and groups in arranging local training events based on specific topic requests. Training resources such as videos and books are also available in some localities for foster parents.
- Foster parents receive information and updates twice a year through *Fostering Perspectives*, a training newsletter designed by DSS primarily for foster/adoptive/kinship parents.

Areas Needing Improvement

- There is inconsistency in the regularity of foster parent meetings and training programs from locality to locality.
- Foster parents in some localities need additional information on foster parents' rights.
- Foster parents need training relating to children with special needs and teens.

Status of Training - Substantial Conformity

VIII. SERVICE ARRAY

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3 X	4

Item 35. The State has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

When a county DSS becomes involved with a family due to a report of abuse, neglect, or dependency the primary responsibility of the agency is to assure the child(ren)'s safety, health and well-being. When a child can be safely maintained in the home, the agency may or may not take legal custody, depending on the situation. Intensive preventative services are time-limited to 6 months.

North Carolina was awarded a Families for Kids planning grant in 1993 through the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Since that time, the system of Children's Services delivery has been influenced by: Families for Kids 2, which furthered lessons learned through Families for Kids to other counties; the IV-E waiver, which allowed participating counties to experiment with flexible spending to achieve goals; and the Challenge for Children, which focuses attention on children achieving permanence before entering the backlog of 12 months in care.

In response to the Adoption and Safe Families Act, North Carolina created a Family Reunification Pilot Project: the Restoring Families Program. This program was designed to reduce the number of children in DSS custody due to severe caretaker substance abuse.

The Division has collaborated with the Division of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services to implement a process "New Beginnings" to meet the behavioral health needs of children in care and to prevent children from coming into care solely to have their behavioral health needs met.

Family Preservation Services/Intensive Family Preservation Services are community based. Family Resource Centers and Family Support Programs are provided to strengthen and support families as a preventive measure to decrease child abuse and neglect and to keep families intact.

Through the Department of Public Health, the Health Families Program provides intensive home visitation to families with newborns and those families that are at risk.

The Chafee Foster Care Independence Act, known in North Carolina as LINKS, provided the means to expand services to older youth ages 13-21.

There are performance-based contracts with four private agencies to recruit, train, and prepare adoptive parents for children with special needs. There are also contracts regarding recruitment issues and to increase the recruitment of African American families. The Special Children Adoption Fund continues to be a major factor in the increased number of children placed for adoption. Money received from the fund must be used to enhance the adoption programs in the counties and in the private agencies.

North Carolina has used IV-E Waiver status to pilot subsidized guardianship for children.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- In some areas DSS has adequate and effective services in place to respond to needs of the majority of children and families with several examples of remarkable and unique services noted in the review. The quality of some of the resources noted in the review appear to be outstanding and are certainly seen as valuable to the agency and families.
- A particularly innovative service is the collaborative program with the medical community implemented in 24 counties that includes intensive primary prevention services with frequent home visits. These services focus on providing early medical intervention and working with families on responding to children's developmental and parenting issues.
- A very significant addition to the services array is the legislation passed during the last session regarding children at risk and children in residential treatment. Although the program is not fully in place yet, the legislation broadened the range of children who would benefit from intensive treatment. In a "system of care" concept, DSS, Mental Health and Juvenile Justice are required to work together to implement the program through memoranda of agreement to receive the funds. The program does not have an entitlement requirement. Those eligible are children whose needs cross agency lines and are in out of home care or at risk of out of home placement, including children who might have to go into out of home care to get their mental health needs met and juvenile justice children. Clients who meet the criteria must be served using this approach. No one agency can work alone. The model includes child and family teams for each family, who collaboratively staff cases and develop a coordinated plan. They collaboratively provide services but have only one primary case manager. The program includes wrap-around services and creating services around children and families' needs. Services must be medically necessary. The authority exists to expand this program to all North Carolina children, but it currently excludes very few DSS children.
- Some of the other noteworthy services highly regarded as important resources were: The Teen Health Connection, a specialized teen medical facility; a Pediatric Resource Center, that does medical evaluations, forensic interviewing of victims and siblings and non-offending parents in sexual and physical abuse cases, among other services; a Family Center; and a Community Child Development Partnership. Also in at least one county the agency has two nurses available who very effectively assist foster parents in scheduling medical appointments and managing the children's care. Some of the general services provided are group

and family therapy, Therapeutic Foster Care, support groups, mentors for children with serious behavioral and emotional needs, a Big Brother/Big Sister program, an Intensive Outpatient program for substance abuse and inpatient services for substance abuse.

- Where available, Intensive Family Preservation Services are very useful time-limited services.
- Another strength noted in the review is the partnerships with Child Youth Services (CYS); that agency provides valuable services when foster care parents need services for children with behavioral problems.
- Although there are issues in regards to mental health services, such as delays in screenings in some cases and others listed below, the services that are provided are seen as valuable resources.
- In-school social workers also reported DSS workers are generally responsive, coming onsite to schools to participate with school social workers and counselors with particular children and situations.

Areas Needing Improvement

- Although the recent development of the “system of care” collaborative is a definite strength, some workers are not familiar with this concept. DSS needs to make sure frontline staff know about and implement it.
- Stakeholders acknowledge that the gaps in services that exist to varying degrees in different localities are a community issue that requires more collaboration, in that the issues cannot be resolved solely by DSS. There is an overall concern about the lack of resources from foster homes to the entire range of services needed by the population that DSS serves. Children brought into care are seen as needing more and higher levels of services than ever before. There is concern about the agency not sufficiently addressing, through effective needs assessment and matching of services, the problems of parents’ behavior that negatively affect the safety, permanency and well-being of children.
- Stakeholders expressed concerns in some areas about the lack or effectiveness of mental health, substance abuse and domestic violence services. Concerns were also expressed about the perceived lack of coordination between DSS and Mental Health at the casework level, sometimes causing these issues to not be addressed adequately. A particular concern is that in-home families do not have ready access to mental health care for children and youth or for the parents. Stakeholders expressed a need for more services addressing substance abuse and residential care particularly for females. One focus group identified the lack of treatment for sexually abused children so they do not become perpetrators. There are sometimes other gaps in services for older children (13

years and up), particularly in locating group or in-home placements, and therapeutic homes. The result is temporary placements until more stable placements are identified. Evaluations for CYS services can take 1-2 months.

- Stakeholders expressed concerns about lack of funding for mental health services for moderately unstable, needy children. Funding allows services to children with most critical needs only. Others noted concerns in general about the effectiveness of the Managed Care System. Some stakeholders feel that it saves money, but some needed services are not provided, especially not preventive services prior to children overtly acting out. It is felt that therapeutic services are only provided by Mental Health for children with overt acting out behavior when many cases may have serious issues prior to that.
- Front-end services, such as family preservation and family support services, are less than adequate in some areas even to the extent of not being well-known or even existing, particularly family preservation. Intensive Family Preservation Services is a time-limited service available to clients that can be very useful. However, a need is to develop the step-down model so the families who need it can be gradually moved off of the more intensive model.
- The potential exists for gaps in services to the growing Hispanic population due to language and other cultural barriers.
- Although families with active CPS cases are eligible for childcare services, closure of the case ends eligibility, and families must re-apply, oftentimes causing them to move to the end of the wait list for child care services. Stakeholders also expressed concern about the non-availability of childcare or supervision when children are suspended from school.

Item 36. The services in item 35 are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State’s CFSP.

_____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Family Preservation Services are available in 68 counties, with ultimate plans to expand the service statewide. As a result of these services, placement prevention rates have been between 88% and 92% each year since SFY 1994 in these counties.

Fifty-four Family Resource Centers and fifteen Family Support Programs are partially or fully funded through title IV-B, part B dollars. In addition, there are 24 sites that provide home visitation prevention services.

Child Protective Services, Foster Care Services and Adoption Services are mandated and available to any child in the State. North Carolina ensures that all special needs children who are in foster care placement and who are placed for adoption receive Adoption Assistance through the allocation of State funds when the child is not IV-E eligible. Family Support Services are open to any family desiring the services. For the most part, these services are not housed in a department of social services, but rather are community based.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- Many services, including home visitation and other services of Family Support Programs and Family Resource Centers, are provided in areas that are accessible to the families and children, with some located in their own communities.
- Where Family Preservation Services are available, they are seen as a valuable in-home service that help prevent placement of children into foster care.

Areas Needing Improvement

- Front-end services, such as family preservation and family support services, are less than adequate in some areas even to the extent of not being well-known or even existing, particularly family preservation.
- In-home and adoptive families do not have as ready access to mental health services for children and other services such as respite as foster care cases do.
- Lack of transportation may preclude services for some families.
- Generally, in some areas, substance abuse services are seen as not being provided in the communities where they are needed the most.

Item 37. The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

A critical part of pre-placement services involves relatives and other kin who can provide needed supports and resources for families in crisis. This network of individuals is involved to help plan for and provide safety, care, nurture, and supervision for the child as well as support to the family. The Division is encouraging counties to adopt Family Group Decision-Making as an effective tool to involve the kinship network.

Risks to the child and family are evaluated throughout the investigative assessment and are formally assessed at the point of substantiation. Strategies and activities to reduce or eliminate identified risks are integrated into the Initial Case Plan and the Services Agreement.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- DSS generally appears to be tailoring case plans and services around the individual needs of children, but to a lesser degree around the individual needs of families to help them meet the needs of their children. Two examples of individualizing services include the following:
- In one review site the agency made a good effort to improve services to the Hispanic community by hiring a Spanish-speaking staff person.
- Also in that site the parenting classes were reported to be excellent and individualized for parents, even to the extent of “coming to the parent if the parent can’t come to the class.”

Areas Needing Improvement

- The agency’s practice does not appear to be family-centered in that the focus is on the child rather than the family, which leads to less effective engagement of the parents and less effective delivery of services to parents to help them meet their child’s needs. This lack of a family centered approach decreases the extent of effective individualization of needs assessment and services provision. Workers also tend to have very high caseloads, and this contributes to their difficulty in individualizing services. Services seem to be delivered according to a set design rather than being individualized to unique needs. This was seen particularly in the in-home cases, but was generally indicated overall.

- One focus group expressed concerns that parenting classes are focused on parenting children without problems rather than children and youth presenting behavior problems.
- Flexible funding could increase flexible, individualized services and family centered practice.

Status of Service Array - Substantial Conformity

IX. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3	4 X

Item 38. In implementing the provisions of the CFSP, the State engages in ongoing consultation with tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Throughout the year, DSS solicits and receives feedback from external community stakeholders regarding the DSS child welfare system. In particular, this feed back is incorporated into policy development. These organizations include the Family Preservation and Family Support Steering Committee, the Child Fatality Review System, the Training Advisory Committee, Community Partners, LINKS (Independent Living) advisory committee, SAYSO (Strong Able Youth Speak Out), the N.C. Chapter of the American Pediatric Society's Subcommittee on Child Abuse and Neglect, the Court Improvement Project, the Business Reengineering Project, and the Families for Kids Collaborative.

The DSS also has a collaborative with the Division of Mental Health and Substance Abuse called New Beginnings, which focuses on the behavioral health needs of children. The DSS is also planning a Multiple Response Pilot in five counties, whereby CPS workers will conduct joint interviews with law enforcement on cases of severe abuse.

North Carolina has the largest Native American population east of the Mississippi River and the seventh largest Native American population in the nation. The Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians has their tribal lands in North Carolina. In addition to the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians, North Carolina recognizes nine tribes and tribal organizations. The North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs provides consultation to county Departments of Social Services in order to connect them with governing councils of Federal and State recognized tribes. North Carolina has, in the past 25 years, maintained good relations with its tribes and Native American organizations. The Division has been able to forge close, valuable working relationships with the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- DSS is visible and maintains strong community ties, participating in local community activities beyond the child welfare arena. While external partnerships vary depending on the locality, there is an overall healthy sense of cooperation between DSS and law enforcement, courts, mental health, child advocacy, and other child- and family-serving agencies in the community.
- Strong collaborative partnerships exist resulting in DSS staff consulting regularly with other child and family-serving entities and responding to concerns. DSS involves other State and Tribal agencies in aspects of program planning, including the opportunity to review and comment on DSS State plans and amendments.
- In North Carolina, the Indian population comprises 1.2% of the State's population (based on the 1990 census). Seven Tribes have State recognition and one, the Eastern Band of Cherokee, is Federally recognized. DSS has made a conscientious effort to educate staff about the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) requirements, particularly in counties with significant Indian populations. The on-site review revealed that efforts are ongoing to maintain supports for Tribal children and families. Through a contract between DSS and the Cherokee Center for Family Services, intensive family preservation services are available to Cherokee families across three counties. The working relationship between DSS and the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indian Tribe is particularly positive at the State level.
- DSS maintains an excellent rapport with Foster Parent, Guardians ad litem and child advocacy groups.

Areas Needing Improvement

- While initial activities have occurred to begin educating DSS staff about cultural differences, no distinct plan exists for ensuring effective services to the growing Hispanic and Asian populations in the state.
- Communications with Tribal representatives should occur on a more routine, frequent basis; a tendency exists for dialogue to occur primarily when specific planning processes are underway or reports are due.
- In some, particularly larger localities, additional work is needed among the agency, courts, attorneys and GAL to ensure a good understanding of respective processes and goals.

Item 39. The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered pursuant to the CFSP.

____ Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

An annual report of aggregated data is produced and publicized to partners and to the public via our Children's Services web page at <http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/childrensservices/>

Basis: Onsite Review

Areas Needing Improvement

- While the annual report of aggregated data is produced and available to partners and the public with Internet capability, the extent of consultation with partners in compiling the annual progress report is limited.

- DSS would strengthen their ongoing partnerships with community partners by involving them more routinely in quality assurance efforts such as the biennial review and policy development.

Item 40. The State's services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The Division has partnered with other Divisions within the State system and devised procedures to enhance collaboration with other community agencies conducting similar duties. The Division has collaborated with the Division of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services to implement a process to meet behavioral health needs of children. The Division is beginning a pilot project where CPS workers will conduct joint interviews with law enforcement on cases of severe abuse. Child Welfare, TANF Program, and Child Support staffs are becoming increasingly familiar with each other's programs. Child Welfare staff have participated in the development of a Hardship Policy for the TANF families about to exit benefits. DSS social workers and public school teachers coordinate efforts in providing services to children. Teachers frequently provide guidance to social workers on the behavioral characteristics of children in their caseloads as well as making their ideas known during agency review team meetings.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- DSS has strong collaborative partnership relationships resulting in memoranda of understanding, cross-training, joint training, and community education of agency policies and mission. Joint participation results in coordinated services to the same service population; examples include the New Beginnings partnership with Mental Health, Day-One conferences, Child Fatality and Prevention Teams, and Disaster/Emergency Operations Teams.
- In some localities, one-stop-shop centers exist in cooperation with other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population.

Areas Needing Improvement

- While there is strong collaboration at the State level between the Division of Social Services and other State offices, such as mental health, substance abuse, health, etc. and Tribes, that coordination is not as effective locally, largely due to the autonomy/independence of county departments.
- There is some concern that DSS is ‘crisis-driven,’ even acknowledging the planning and innovations evidenced through supports, services and collaborations. More strategic planning is desired so that fewer casework decisions are driven by funding decisions rather than needs of families.
- DSS should consider focused coordination with other service agencies to develop transportation supports or community-based services to underserved populations.

Status of Responsiveness to the Community - Substantial Conformity

X. FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION

Rating of Review Team Regarding Substantial Conformity				
Rating	Not in Substantial Conformity		Substantial Conformity	
	1	2	3 X	4

Item 41. The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and childcare institutions which are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

State statute specifies that the Social Services Commission is delegated the authority to promulgate minimum licensure standards for family foster homes, residential childcare, and child placing agencies. In addition to the licensure rules for child placing agencies for foster care and adoption, family foster home and childcare institutions, administrative rules addressing standards for approval of adoptive homes and kinship care homes have been implemented.

During the initial assessment for foster family and adoptive homes, references must be obtained and fingerprint based criminal history checks must be conducted. In addition, 30 hours of pre-service competency based training is required for foster and adoptive parent applicants. There are also fire and building safety regulations and health and environmental regulations that foster family homes are required to meet.

Core licensure standards for residential child care facilities combines licensure standards for childcare institutions, group homes, emergency shelters, and foster care camps. These standards are based on the Child Welfare League of America recommended childcare facility standards.

Licenses are reviewed annually by licensing consultants. When licensure standards are not met, either a provisional license may be issued or adverse license actions are implemented. Waivers of licensing regulations in the State are governed by administrative rules. When there are requests for exceptions to licensing rules, practice guidance developed by DSS is followed. Waivers focus on child-specific situations and the child's permanency plan. The State feels the waivers of licensing rules have enhanced placements of children.

Basis: Onsite Review

Area Needing Improvement

- While licenses are reviewed annually by licensing consultants, the initial and on-going monitoring by way of home visits is performed by the caseworker who has a foster child in that home. This could present a conflict-of-interest situation in that a worker who found their foster home unsuitable would be obliged to find a new home, which may not be readily available. The risk then is that the worker will overlook or minimize deficiencies, or over-rely on provisional licenses, or request waivers which may not be in the child's best interest.

Item 42. The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or childcare institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The State licensing standards apply to all foster family homes or childcare institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds. There is a provision for waiving individual requirements on a case-by-case basis. Licensure of foster family homes and approval of adoptive

homes and kinship care homes involve a process of screening and information gathering and evaluation by the agency worker in face to face meetings with the prospective care-givers over a prescribed period of time.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- During the onsite review, there was no indication, from case reviews or stakeholder interviews, that standards were not applied to all foster homes or institutions that receive title IV-E or IV-B funds.

Item 43. The State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children.

 Strength X Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

The statutory requirement for fingerprint-based criminal records checks for family foster homes went into effect January 1, 1996. The statutory requirement for fingerprint-based criminal records check for adoptive homes went into effect January 1, 1999.

Licensure rules that specifically address personnel qualifications require that childcare institutions obtain at least two references and a criminal record check as part of the hiring process.

Policies regarding child placement practice emphasize a strong planning component that begins at the first contact. Strategies and activities to reduce or eliminate identified risks are integrated into the Initial Case Plan and the Services Agreement. The Family Services Case Plan includes a Placement Component that requires review of the primary and alternative permanent plans, the appropriateness of placement, judicial determinations, services to implement the plan, and partnerships with the placement provider. The Children's Services Standards emphasize regular assessment of risk and frequent reviews of the case plan.

Basis: Onsite Review

Area Needing Improvement

- Stakeholders report that it has been the practice to place children in foster homes before the results of the criminal background check have been received. This policy was enacted during a time when it took eight to ten weeks to receive the results. Presently, it takes three or four weeks to get the results and the practice continues. It should be discontinued and procedures put in place whereby the criminal background check can be requested earlier in the licensing process in order to receive the results prior to final licensing and placement.

Item 44. The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

Foster care and adoption policies and standards include requirements that counties must recruit foster and adoptive homes that reflect the ethnic and racial identity of children in care. The State also has contracts with four private agencies, including Another Choice for Black Children, to recruit, train, and prepare adoptive parents for children with special needs.

DSS also has a partnership agreement with the General Baptist Convention of North Carolina, Inc., a convention that includes over 5,000 African-American Baptist Churches. In 1999 this partnership was expanded to include all African-American Churches, regardless of denomination. The purpose of the partnership is to assist the State in the recruitment of foster and adoptive homes in the African-American community.

In state fiscal year 98/99 the number of finalized adoptions for African American children was 461. In state fiscal year 99/00, the number was 602.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- Through contracts and agreements, the State has resources in place at the local level to recruit foster parents. The State is also aware of the fact that as the number of adoptions increase, the turn over rate of foster parents will accelerate, insofar as the majority of adoptive parents come from the ranks of foster parents.

Area Needing Improvement

- From stakeholder interviews and the case review, it was apparent there is a substantial and growing need for Hispanic foster and adoptive parents. A concerted effort to recruit bilingual caseworkers or case aids may aid in the recruitment and service provision for would-be Hispanic foster and adoptive parents.

Item 45. The State has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children.

 X Strength Area Needing Improvement

Basis: Statewide Assessment

If a placement resource has not been identified in 90 days after the child becomes legally free the child must be registered on the North Carolina Adoption Resource Exchange (NCARE). All children registered on NCARE are listed on the website, the regional and national exchanges, placed in the photo listing book and are presented in the media. Adoptive placements across county and state lines are encouraged. Within the state there are regional meetings of social workers who discuss the waiting children and available families.

Basis: Onsite Review

Strengths

- The State is a member of the Interstate Compact on Adoptions and Medical Assistance (ICAMA), and has identified staff to work with cross-jurisdictional State agencies in arranging and monitoring of placements.

Area Needing Improvement

- There is a concern regarding barriers to inter-jurisdictional placements. Stakeholders estimated this barrier adds six months to a year to some placements.

XI. DETERMINATION OF SUBSTANTIAL CONFORMITY

For each outcome and systemic factor listed below, mark “Y” where the State is determined to be in substantial conformity and “N” where the State is determined not to be in substantial conformity. For each outcome or systemic factor marked “N,” place a check beside the performance indicator, listed by item number in this form, that has been determined to be an area needing improvement.

Safety

☐N Outcome S1

☐ Item 1

☒ Item 2

☐N Outcome S2

☒ Item 3

☒ Item 4

Permanency

☐N Outcome P1

☐ Item 5

☒ Item 6

☒ Item 7

☒ Item 8

☐ Item 9

☐ Item 10

☐N Outcome P2

☐ Item 11

☐ Item 12

☐ Item 13

☒ Item 14

☐ Item 15

☐ Item 16

Child and Family Well-Being

☐N Outcome WB1

☒ Item 17

☒ Item 18

☐ Item 19

☐ Item 20

☐N Outcome WB2

☒ Item 21

☐N Outcome WB3

☐ Item 22

☒ Item 23

Systemic Factors

☐Y Statewide Information System

☐ Item 24

☐Y Case Review System

☐ Item 25

☐ Item 26

☐ Item 27

☐ Item 28

☐ Item 29

☐Y Quality Assurance System

☐ Item 30

☐ Item 31

☐Y Training

☐ Item 32

☐ Item 33

☐ Item 34

☐Y Service Array

☐ Item 35

☒ Item 36

☐ Item 37

☐Y Agency Responsiveness to the Community

☐ Item 38

☒ Item 39

☐ Item 40

☐Y Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

☐ Item 41

☐ Item 42

☒ Item 43

☐ Item 44

☐ Item 45